BOSTON'S FY06 LOCAL ANNUAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS PLAN

N.B.—This is the initial draft narrative portion of the FY2006 Boston Local Workforce Development Business Plan that will be submitted to the Commonwealth on June 3, 2005. In accordance with the guidelines issued by the State, under the authority of the federal Workforce Investment Act, each local area must respond to five questions. These questions are introduced below, with each of Boston's proposed responses following.

1. ***Please describe the local area's overarching initiatives/objectives for providing services to job seekers for FY2006.***

The Boston's workforce system's overarching initiatives/objectives for providing services to job seekers are focused, as they were in the FY2005, on providing high quality and results-oriented services to unemployed job seekers through career centers and training opportunities. In order to further these objectives, the workforce system in FY06 will focus on:

- Managing the increased volume of customers accessing career centers while making every effort to maintain the quality of services the centers provide.
- Making effective use of other funding streams to help support capacity to serve special populations with extraordinary barriers to employment including the chronically homeless, persons with disabilities, limited English speakers, ex-offenders.
- Using labor market information to align outreach to employers with the skills of job seekers who are using career center services.

Managing Volume

The Boston workforce system has experienced a sharp increase in the over-all volume of job seekers accessing career center services, particularly those that are unemployed. In FY 2004, the career centers served 17,106 job seekers, a 124% increase in job seeker volume since fiscal year 2000. The proportion of unemployed job seekers rose from 73% in FY98 to 91% in FY2004, when 14,643 jobseekers identified themselves as unemployed. Through the second quarter of FY2005, career centers saw nearly as many customers (15,917) as the total number in FY2004, and were on a track that would see a doubling of demand for their services in one year.

The funding streams that support career center services have declined by more than a third over the past seven years. Meanwhile, the state's requirement that permanently separated unemployment insurance claimants use the services of career centers in order to receive Unemployment Insurance benefits has significantly contributed to a **266% increase** in the number of UI claimants accessing Boston's career

centers in just one year. While 961 UI claimants had been seen through the second quarter of 2004, 2,553 were seen in the comparable period of 2005.

Not only has there been an increase in volume of customers for career centers to respond to, but it is also clear that Connecting Claimant customers have a different set of expectations that the career centers have been struggling to address through changes in their service mix and staff development. They have made substantial progress in this area over FY05 and we expect these adaptations will continue in FY 06. Even with these realignments, however, adequate resources within the WIA system as currently funded simply do not exist. Career centers have adopted "above and beyond" as their modus operandi. Although we haven't seen indications of a decrease in quality of the services offered at career centers, we have seen a shift to more group services and an expression of expectations of some Connecting Claimants customers for more advanced workshops.

Overall, Boston's Wagner Peyser allocation for FY06 is 2.6% above the FY05 allocation. This represents the average of a 3.3% increase in 90% funds and a .3% decrease in 10% funds. With these funds, we expect to serve over 20,000 job seeking customers. While Boston uses these funds to help provide core services to career center customers, obviously they are far from sufficient to underwrite the service levels required by the Connecting Claimants initiative, even at the "core" level. This underfunding, coupled with the involuntary nature of many claimants' first contacts with the one stop system, generates serious pressure on the system's ability to maintain high levels of quality service.

For adults with limited workforce histories or obsolete skills, training is critical to eventual re-employment. For this reason, Boston has traditionally directed a very large portion of its adult Title I-a and I-d allocations to providing occupational skills training. For FY06, 75% of service funding will be allocated to training services and 25% of both I-a and I-d services funding will be directed toward the provision of intensive services by career centers.

For FY 06, the Title I adult and dislocated funding streams have increased by 19.9% and 1 %, respectively, while the Sec. 173 (e) funds have decreased by 77%. A major infusion of Sec. 173(e) funds last year allowed us to transfer funds from dislocated worker funding to the adult funding stream in order to be able to undertake a pilot project targeted to young 18-24 year old adults, particularly men. With the cuts to Sec. 173 (e) funds this year, we do not propose any such transfers for FY06. In addition, the average cost of an ITA has risen over the $4,200 projected for FY05. For FY06, we project an average ITA cost of $4,500. This means that for dislocated workers, the number of ITAs available in FY06 will be 223. Of these, 213 will be supported with WIA I-d funds and 10 will be supported by Sec. 173 (e) funds.

For Dislocated Workers, Boston's goal is to enroll 223 in Title I-d training activities during FY06. Of those, up to 26 will be enrolled in English for Employment (ESOL) activities, and the remainder will be enrolled in occupational skills training through ITAs. In addition to these new enrollees, we will be carrying in to FY06 105

trainees enrolled during FY05 who have not exited the program. Seventy-nine percent of I-d program exiters (153) will be placed in employment, with an average earnings gain of -$1,800. We expect that the Employment Retention Rate for those placed will be 86% and their Employment and Credential Rate will be 58%. Because Boston has a system for releasing training funds at three times during the year, we estimate that 134 customers enrolled in I-d during FY06 will be carry-outs to FY07.

In the Title I adult funding stream, we anticipate that up to 233 training slots will be available for FY06. Of these, up to 34 will be in English for Employment activities. In addition, we expect that 12 new additional trainees will be enrolled in the project that was funded in FY05 through the transfer of dislocated worker funds to the adult pool of funds, bringing the total new enrollees receiving training services to 245. Finally, we expect that 122 trainees will carry over from FY05. For Title I Adult-funded exiters, Boston expects that 72% (158) will be placed into employment. Boston's goal for the Employment Retention Rate of these I-a enrollees is 80%. The Earnings Gain goal for these enrollees is $3,300 and we project that they will exhibit an Employed with Credential Rate of 58%. We project that 147 trainees will be carry-outs to FY07.

The best way to demonstrate the benefit to the local economy and the return on investment that these WIA enrollees would generate is through the wage record reports filed by employers with the Department of Revenue. Because wage records lag by one year, the latest information available from this source is for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2003. In that year, Boston career centers had placed in jobs 68% of all unemployed jobseekers who used their services. Altogether in Boston, these jobseekers earned $54.3 million in wages and an estimated $3 million in income taxes paid to the Commonwealth. This does not capture additional spending, sales tax revenues or reductions in spending by the UI Trust Fund caused by helping people get back to work more quickly.[1]

Special Populations with Extraordinary Barriers to Employment

Boston continues to make effective use of other funding streams to enhance its capacity to serve special populations with extraordinary barriers to employment.

- In the case of Limited English Speakers, we have in the past been able to seek National Emergency Grant funding to deal with major plant closures involving large numbers of limited English speakers. In both the Power One and Federal Mogul closings these funds not only provided an additional infusion of training resources, but also led to service models that have attracted attention from other areas both within and beyond the state. Both of these grants ended in the course of FY 2005. Exhibiting capacity to serve limited English speakers remains important to the Boston workforce system given the fact that Census 2000 data indicated that the only source of population growth in the past decade in the

[1] *Report to the 184th General Court Commonwealth of Massachusetts—Boston One-Stop Career Centers, Fiscal Year 2004.* Submitted by the Boston Private Industry Council and the Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services, February, 2005.

Boston labor market had been foreign immigration. In the absence of such NEG grants, the city continues to allocate WIA dollars to ESOL capacity through English for Employment courses. According to data on Participant Characteristics served with WIA funds in Boston during FY 2005, 27% of Adult enrollees and 33% of Dislocated enrollees were limited English speakers, indicating that the city's workforce system is making progress in integrating this targeted group into career center services. (Statewide averages are 9% and 5%, respectively.)

- Other outside funds have allowed Boston to increase its expertise in serving both the homeless and persons with disabilities. Building on a successful Career Center model of working with community based service providers, Boston has received a US Department of Labor grant to improve and expand employment services to the chronically homeless. To be classified as chronically homeless an individual must have a history of homelessness and a disabling condition. In addition to this initiative, the Department of Transitional Assistance awarded the Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services a food stamp initiative, designed to find homeless food-stamp-eligible individuals and, while enrolling them in the food stamp program, introduce them to opportunities for employment services. Career Centers were integrated into both these initiatives and allocated resources to help them to develop and refine their capacity to serve these populations.

- Finally, we continue to provide services to ex-offenders with grant dollars primarily through a partnership between The Work Place and the Suffolk County House of Correction. Providing support around job training and placement to those individuals transitioning out of the HOC greatly mitigates the likelihood of recidivism. The Suffolk County House of Corrections partnership was later augmented with other grants (Boston Police Re-entry Initiative, Offender Re-Entry Program, Mass Department of Corrections, Serious and Violent Offender Re-entry Initiative). Consolidation of administration led to the development of a "re-entry" team that brings focus to this work. Based on partnerships built with Correction and Justice through these re-entry grants serving men, as well as on an analysis of customer demographics, initial exploration and incipient program design have begun regarding the re-entry needs of female offenders. Re-entry continues to be an area of interest for the Department of Labor and the Department of Justice. As such, opportunities for continuing and expanding this work are anticipated. All funding for this area is based on a competitive response to federal SGAs or state RFPs. The successful work so far and the depth of experience gained will strengthen future responses to funding opportunities.

Labor Market Data

There is some evidence that the Boston region's economy has improved over the course of CY2004.[2] While enormous advances in job creation have not occurred, there

[2] See, for example, *The Boston Economy 2004—Turning the Corner,* Boston Redevelopment Authority, Report #599, September 2004 and *Leading Industries Report,* Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, March 2005.

are indications that at best some jobs have been added, and at worst the enormous job loss the city and state suffered during the economic downturn has abated.

Although reports indicate that there has been an improvement in both the Boston and Massachusetts economies over the past year, unemployment rates for CY2004 (Boston, 5.5%; Massachusetts, 5.1%) are still well above the levels before the economic downturn. And, as was true during the economic downturn, Boston's unemployment rate is still higher than the state's. In comparing April 2003 industry composition of employment with that of April 2004, the most severe job losses percentage-wise were evident in information, professional and business services, financial activities, trade/transportation/utilities, government and durable manufacturing.[3]

Given the slow economic recovery and job loss from the recession, putting people back to work remains challenging throughout the state.[4] This is particularly true for Boston, whose job loss was greater percentage wise than was that of the state's and whose population has higher concentrations of residents at each of the two ends of almost all demographic indicators.

During FY05, the Boston system continued to evolve in its use of labor market data to assess the skills of its talent pool with the demands of the business sector. At the career centers, business development representatives documented and presented this strategy and relevant data during the Charter Review process. Each career center and the system overall increased the number of hires for job seeker customers of career centers. During FY06 the Workforce Board plans to sponsor a series of technical assistance seminars to support system staffs' understanding of available labor market data, how to access it and how to use it more effectively in meeting the expectations of both job seeker and business customers.

In FY05, the Title I Administrator continued its role as a convener and capacity builder for the workforce development system in Boston. For example, it co-sponsored a 10-week training course for job developers at community based vendors. Using a curriculum developed by Public/Private Ventures, this project's goal was to improve skills at the CBO level in doing business in the new environment, including interfacing with employers and developing jobs. The Title I Administrator will continue this convening and system building role in FY06.

2. Please describe the local area's overarching initiatives/objectives for providing services to employers for FY2006.

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[3] *The Boston Economy 2004* p. 11.

[4] In commenting on the Chamber's report, Jim Klocke, the Chamber's executive vice president , remarked, "It's the first time in a few years that we've seen positive job growth, but it's nowhere near enough to make up for the jobs we lost in 2002 and 2003." Boston Globe, "Region Poised for renewed growth," March 30, 2005.

The primary initiatives and objectives for our work with employers have not changed since FY05. However, based on the progress made in FY05, we have reordered and refined these initiatives:

- Aligning employer outreach by the career centers with the skill sets of unemployed job seekers who are using the career centers;
- Aligning economic development with workforce development;
- Supporting industry consortia.

Aligning Employer Outreach

The career centers have taken a number of steps to better serve employer customers:

- Collecting accurate and relevant skills and experience data for job seekers and matching job seekers more accurately with employers;

  In addition to efforts described below in the response to Question 5 regarding use of labor market data and plans to sponsor professional development activities to increase the expertise of career center staff in the regular use of such data, during FY05 there was a significant increase in job fair activity at the centers. All centers sponsored employer activities on Jobs First Day. Four additional job fairs were held during FY05 with each attracting between 500-800 job seekers. Business customers were recruited based on career center analysis of industry demand and skills of the talent pool. Reviews of the fairs were extremely positive with some level of "on the spot" hiring occurring at each fair.

- Collecting voice of the customer feedback in collaboration with the Board through interviews and focus groups;

  This element is discussed below in Question 5 where "Voice of the Customer" data is discussed. During FY05 we piloted a Questionnaire for business customers. During FY06 we will fully implement the Questionnaire.

- Educating employers who are working with special populations about the CORI and about accommodating disabilities.

  The Board has been supporting individual career center initiatives through grant related work (HomeWork, e.g.) and one-to-one networking with employers. In FY 06 we will explore the feasibility of holding a business customer breakfast to promote the benefits of hiring from these populations.

Based on data reflecting FY05 service to employer customers, we expect to serve no less than 300 employers in FY06. The outcome goal we expect to achieve with these customers is a 72% Customer Satisfaction score.

Aligning economic development with workforce development

The head of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the city's chief economic development agency, is a member of the area's Workforce Investment Board. The Title I Administrator works closely with the BRA to ensure that workforce planning is a critical and well-developed component of any major new development. These efforts have resulted in Master Plans for the Longwood Medical Area and Harvard's Allston campus that require institutions or developers to both detail their workforce needs and implement a workforce development plan that enhances access for Boston residents to these jobs. In the Longwood Medical Area, this requirement has already led to increased investment in

workforce development on the parts of Brigham and Women's Hospital, Beth Israel/Deaconess Medical Center and the Joslin Diabetes Center.

In addition, in Boston the Zoning law requires that commercial construction projects in excess of 100,000 square feet receive a zoning variance, one condition of which is that the developer of the building is obligated to pay a linkage fee, based on square footage, to the Neighborhood Jobs Trust (NJT). Funds from this Trust have periodically been used to add additional resources for training to the city's workforce development system as they were during FY05 and will be in FY06. These resources support funding for job training activities that complement those provided with WIA funds. NJT funds have helped to support the English for New Bostonians initiative, which expands access to ESOL instruction in the city. Finally, NJT funds were used in the SkillWorks Initiative to leverage funds from private foundations for a $15-$20 million project that includes sectoral initiatives and capacity building within the broader Boston workforce development system.

Supporting Industry Consortium

Given the extremely limited resources of the WIA contribution to the city's workforce development system, many of the activities undertaken involving employers in targeted sectors are underwritten by other funding streams. This mirrors the situation which was described above in discussing services to job seekers.

The Workforce Board is working with health care employers to develop a pipeline strategy that addresses their skill needs over the next five years. This project was launched with private dollars. We have started to work with four hospitals to develop workforce priorities and programs that respond to those priorities. During FY05, the Workforce Board began preliminary discussions with major employers in the financial services sector with the aim of establishing the groundwork for a similar initiative. Further explorations for this initiative will be undertaken in FY06.

In the construction industry, the Building Careers Partnership leverages earlier WIA-funded career exploration work and focuses on improving access of both in- and out-of-school youth to careers in the construction sector. (For more details on this initiative, see below, Question 3.)

Through a BayStateWorks (BEST III) grant awarded to the Boston Private Industry Council a partnership was developed with VinFen Corporation, Goodwill Industries, Boston Career Link, Bunker Hill Community College, WorkSource and the Boston Housing Authority. Through this collaboration incumbent workers in the human services field will be provided with the skills they need to advance, and other trainees will be prepared through enter entry-level training for employment as Direct Care Workers.

The SkillWorks Initiative, referenced above, which was largely underwritten with funds from the City of Boston's Neighborhood Jobs Trust, has as one of its key components the funding of sectoral initiatives. There are two initiatives in the health care

field. One, Partners in Career and Workforce Development, is led by the Partners HealthCare System and includes both pre-employment and incumbent worker services and "involves the enhancement and coordination of multiple workforce development activities at three of the Boston based hospitals within the Partners network."[5] The second health care sector grant, awarded to the Health Care Research and Training Institute, allows that group to institutionalize a sectoral career ladders project focused on the Longwood Medical and Academic Area. This collaboration "has created an employment pipeline for residents, and seeks to streamline and simplify the recruiting and hiring process for health care employers." The third partnership funded in the initial implementation grants by SkillWorks is one between the International Institute of Boston (IIB) and the Hilton Hotel Corporation, the largest hotel property management firm in Boston. This grant has allowed IIB to expand their successful Hospitality Training program which helps low-income recent immigrants move toward economic self-sufficiency while at the same time establishing within Hilton an incumbent worker program aimed at improving employee retention. Finally, SkillWorks funded two planning grants for sector-based initiatives. These partnerships, one in the automotive maintenance and repair sector and the other involving SEIU custodial workers, have moved on to implementation funding status from SkillWorks.

These projects clearly contribute to promoting economic stability and development in the local area. They are focused on developing workers skilled in areas that are either pillars of Boston's economy or in which opportunities for well-paying jobs have been projected. They all include strong employer partnerships, and curriculum has been employer-driven. Several of them include incumbent worker components aimed at improving employee retention, something that has a direct relationship to any employer's "bottom line."

3. For FY2006 what are your area's primary priorities and strategies for managing and improving performance and access to the WIA Title I youth services? How did the region identify these priorities and strategies (labor market information and research, demographics of youth and resulting needs, etc.)? How will the local program of youth services incorporate the practice of "youth voice" into the development of these strategies (membership on Youth Council, focus groups, surveys, etc.)? Describe progress in meeting youth program priorities and performance goals describe in your FY05 Annual Business Plan.

For FY06 Boston's WIA youth priorities continue to be:

- Supporting and sustaining alternative education capacity for youth who are dropouts or at high risk of dropping out;
- Continuing to focus on career exploration for at-risk youth, designed and delivered in partnership with industry and including summer job opportunities.

[5] *"Baseline Report Of the SkillWorks Initiative,"* Abt Associates and Mt. Auburn Associates, April 2005, p. 33. The descriptions of the three initial implementation projects that follow are based on this Abt & Mt. Auburn report.

This year, we are engaged in strategic planning to assess how well Boston's WIA-funded providers, the Boston Public Schools and other youth-serving institutions are serving the neediest or most disconnected youth. This process is an in-depth process that includes data analysis, youth voice, partnership-building, and systems analysis. Our end goals are to locate gaps between the various systems and better leverage the different service systems to fill those gaps. Another goal is to develop common performance benchmarks for members of the Youth Service Providers Network, the group that provides alternative education and career explorations for WIA-funded youth.

a. We are taking a number of steps to increase employer connections. The first is supporting the construction sector to hire more youth from both in-school and out-of-school programs. This strategy leverages earlier WIA-funded career explorations work to increase the number of private sector employers hiring youth in this field (see section f for detail). This strategy, if successful, would benefit needy youth by bringing them into an accessible, well-paying career field. It would benefit employers by preparing youth to meet a replacement need that is forecasted as baby-boomers retire from the industry.

The second step is the continuation of career explorations programming as a means to build youth-service providers' capacity to develop employer partnerships. Since we started the initiative with the building sector, providers have expanded to the fields of health, facilities maintenance and technology. Though these initiatives take time to grow into partnerships that yield job placements to scale, we believe that the type of relationships between service providers and employers that develop with these programs are the right type of relationships. Employers provide curriculum input so that programs foster the type of skills development that matches employers' needs.

In order to further build providers' capacity with regard to employment, we will pilot-fund one of our programs to build employer relationships in the maritime trades and continue training a group of out-of-school youth in this industry on a longer term basis. We regard this as an important addition because this industry has fewer barriers to employment for court-involved youth.

b. Dropouts, youth at-risk to drop out, young parents, adjudicated youth, foster children and young men are priority populations in Boston. Among our network, there are providers that have specialized in being able to serve these populations. Specializing within the context of a larger network allows small organizations to develop specific capacities while providing access to other capacities through referrals within the network. For example, one program specializes in pregnant and parenting teens, offering assistance with parenting and health instruction, access to day-care and transitions back to high school or into a GED program. Two programs specialize in adjudicated youth, and include intensive relationship development, collaboration with DYS case managers, and CORI counseling.

We are leveraging state Department of Education (DOE) funds to better access the career centers for youth. DOE funds Career Centers to serve out-of-school youth who have failed the MCAS, the states high-stakes test, and thus, lack diplomas. The staff

from this initiative collaborates with the Youth Service Providers' Network, both accepting referrals from the network and referring youth to network services.

c. Boston's WIA-funded youth-service providers of alternative education and career explorations are part of a formal network called the Youth Service Providers Network (YSPN). Their philosophy is that as a network, they have the ability to offer students a broader array of services than any one provider can. They refer WIA (and other) youth to each other so that they can meet the WIA goal of providing a continuum of services during enrollment and follow-up. They have a memorandum of understanding that allows them to share student information for the purpose of effectively serving cross referrals. Members meet monthly to share information, access professional development and plan programming. YSPN members include: Action for Boston Community Development, Boston Asian YES, Bridge Over Troubled Water, Crittenton Hastings House, EDCO Youth Alternative, El Centro Del Cardenal, GED Plus at ESAC, Hull Lifesaving Museum, Inc., Little House, Log School, Notre Dame, Sociedad Latina, Urban Dreams, YearUp, and Youth Build Boston.

In addition, staff from Boston's One-Stop Career Centers, Youth Opportunity, the Boston PIC and Boston Public Schools attend YSPN meetings for the purpose of exchanging information about services, employment opportunities and upcoming program or partnership opportunities.

The YSPN is a subcommittee of the WIA Youth Council and its two co-chairs are voting members of the Youth Council. Several other members of YSPN attend the Youth Council meetings. This provides a common forum for private sector employers, City and state agencies, the WIB, and youth-service providers to share information and resources and to grapple with the issues in serving the most at-risk youth.

d. Major barriers to youth program implementation are the labor market, dwindling federal funds and the data-entry system the state uses to document WIA performance.

The youth employment rate has been low for several years. According to Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies (CLMS), the youth employment rate for 16-19 year olds has fallen from 47.1% in 2000 to 40.4% in 2003-2004 for Massachusetts. Boston is particularly hard hit, with 23.6% of 16-24 year olds being out-of-school and out-of-work in 2004.[6] The PIC's private-sector summer jobs program for in-school youth has fallen from over 5,000 in 2000 to 4,200 during the last two summers. In this context, competition for jobs among youth and adults is stiff and it is more difficult for youth programs to find employment for youth who are out-of-school or in alternative programs.

Another barrier is the dwindling federal funding that is available for alternative education and career explorations. The current funding levels make it difficult for youth service providers to maintain their operations. There has been a steady decline of federal formula funding for youth services over the last decade. Federal DOL funding for WIA

[6] CLMS Analysis of CPS data for the PIC, 2005.

programming, at $1,472,000 for FY 05, represents a substantial funding decrease over time from the JTPA funding level of $4,295,000 in FY 94.

On the more immediate level, Boston's Youth Opportunity Grant was scheduled to end in June of 2005. In Boston, YO funds supported the placement of over 100 YO participants in the alternative education system annually. The end of the grant would remove over $500,000 a year from Boston's alternative education budget. Although the City has requested a no-cost extension of the grant for an additional year, even with this, YO will be greatly reduced in size and in capacity.

At the operational level, another barrier is the data system the state uses to document WIA services and performance. The database is much too complicated. Staff spend too much valuable time on the database when they should be spending more time with the youth they serve. In addition, the way the database is currently configured, providers that subcontract are able to enter data into the system, but are not able to pull reports from the system. This is a lost opportunity for them. If they could pull down reports, they could monitor their own WIA performance and outcomes as they are recorded in the data system.

For technical assistance, Boston would benefit from learning of best practices from around the state and the country. Of particular interest are regions that have a network of youth service providers and that have strong credential and employment outcomes, particularly those that have implemented strong benchmarking systems.

e. The Board and Youth Council provide policy guidance to the youth system, approve spending and are focused on sustaining the capacity that has been supported through the WIA Title 1 grant and the Youth Opportunity (YO) program. The Youth Council's goal is to maximize services to at-risk youth by ensuring that the work of WIA vendors and YO is complementary and mutually supportive. The Fiscal Agent manages the performance of vendors, provides technical assistance, reports to the state on performance and spending, assists in staffing the Youth Council and has been the grant recipient for the Youth Opportunity Center. The youth vendors provide framework services, alternative education, career exploration programs in partnership with employers and summer jobs opportunities in the context of year-round career exploration. The career centers provide referrals and support in the areas of immediate job-search, long-term career coaching, MCAS remediation and other education and training programs to students who have not passed the MCAS.

f. The direction that the PIC, JCS, the Youth Council and the youth service providers are taking is very much aligned with DOL's new youth vision and the state P21 planning process. The PIC was awarded a grant from the Youth Transition Funders Group in December 2004 to undertake strategic planning for struggling students and disconnected youth, including dropouts, adjudicated youth, youth ageing out of foster care, single parents and others. The work includes a broad array of partners, including JCS, the Commonwealth Corporation, YO, the Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON), YSPN and others. The Youth Transitons initiative leverages a number of specific

collaborative initiatives, including work to strengthen Boston's alternative education system and work to help detained youth reenter the educational system**.**

Our planning efforts align with the priorities of the new vision and P21 as follows:

- **Focus on alternative education.** Maintaining and growing Boston's first class second chance system of alternative education and career explorations has been an ongoing priority of our local partnership. Planning work has included alternative education providers, PIC, JCS and Boston Public Schools. One goal we are working on is to gather an accurate data picture of Boston's struggling students and out of school youth. We are considering issues such as demographics, basic skills level and barriers. We are also developing a map of the services that exist along the continuum of readiness for college and career to see how it aligns with the needs of our youth population. We are working with Boston Public Schools to assure quality of the programs and strengthen the information sharing between BPS and alternative programs. BPS is currently conducting quality reviews of the programs with which it contracts. We are working with Jobs For the Future, a national intermediary, on the process of strengthening the relationship between the alternative programs and the Boston Public schools and developing a set of distinct benchmarks for alternative programs in the network.

- **Meet the demands of business, especially in high-growth industries and occupations.** Over the last two years, PIC and JCS have identified building trades careers as an area with potential for at-risk youth. There is a projected growth of jobs due to replacement needs, and a variety of types of job with a range of skill levels represented. The careers are well-paying and of interest to young men at a time when early data returns show us that young men are disproportionately represented in our dropout and incarcerated populations. Finally, our local employers in this industry have shown interest in building a career pipeline for youth.

  Last June, Mayor Thomas M. Menino convened fifteen employers and asked them to work with the City and PIC to build the pipeline. Since then, the employers have been meeting regularly with PIC, JCS, the unions, alternative education providers and Boston Public Schools. They have participated in job shadows and Career Fairs and are preparing for the first private sector summer jobs campaign in the industry.

  An important note here is that the career explorations program in construction, a partnership between the unions, JCS, PIC and BPS was piloted with WIA funds—to great reviews by youth and partners alike. The program has been offered for the last three years and created the infrastructure with which to engage employers.

- **Focus on the neediest youth.** Boston has always had a commitment to using WIA funds to serve the neediest youth, including adjudicated youth, foster

children, single parents, youth in public housing and youth with other barriers. Our Youth Council and our Youth Transitions Planning Group include representatives from the state and local agencies that serve these youth. Boston is piloting a promising reentry initiative for youth committed to the Department of Youth Services, which includes case management for reentering youth, the dedication of BPS policy-level staff to plan for better educational placements and outcomes for reentering youth, and referrals to alternative education programs.

- **Focus on improved performance.** As mentioned above, the Youth Service Providers Network is working with JFF, JCS and PIC to develop benchmarks for quality measures across funding streams, so that it can measure progress for youth, regardless of how their participation in alternative education and career explorations is funded. One area we will consider is what interim measures help us better measure progress made by youth with lower skill levels. We have observed that focus on the neediest youth brings young people with more barriers and lower basic skill levels to our program and that we need tools to measure and incent their early progress. In addition, we will continue to work with the providers to improve their database skills so that they enter completely all of the good work being done for the youth. We will offer more trainings for staff and we will increase and improve our management of their data. (For additional discussion on improved performance as it relates to WIA measures, see Section 5,b, below.

- **Pathways to Success by 21.** Through the Youth Council and the Youth Transitions planning process, PIC, JCS, the Center for Labor Market Studies (CLMS) and others, have been conducting research to map out our at-risk youth population. We seek to better identify who they are, why they struggle in school, why they drop out and how services in Boston align to their needs. Part of this research is quantitative, where CLMS has taken the lead. Another part is qualitative and includes focus groups of youth and parents, as well as interviews and surveys of state agencies and service providers. Jerome Dean, the Pathways to Success Coordinator for the state, is a member of our Youth Transitions Planning team and has given us guidance and suggestions on our plan.

- **Youth and Parent Voice.** In order to better understand youth needs, our strategic planning process includes a series of youth and parent focus groups that are currently in process. A total of 16 youth focus groups targets groups such as struggling students, dropouts, adjudicated youth, truant middle-schoolers and parenting teens. The WIA-funded providers, YSPN members, are helping to organize and conduct the groups. BPON is organizing 6-8 parent groups, including a group in Spanish and a group in Cape Verdean Creole. Providers plan to use the feedback, along with the resource-mapping project, to better plan for program components in the upcoming years.

4. Please describe how the local area will allocate training funds and resources in FY06 to assure skill enhancement across the broadest adult and dislocated customer base.

Boston will allocate 75% of FY06 WIA service dollars for both adults and dislocated workers toward training. The remaining 25% will be directed toward the provision of intensive services by career centers. At the same time, we expect the average cost of an ITA will increase from the $4,200 for FY05 to $4,500 in FY06. Balancing these increased ITA costs, the increases in formula training funds and the decrease in Boston's Section 173(e) allocation, we expect that there will be 233 ITAs for dislocated worker customers in FY06, 213 through Title ID and 10 through Sec. 173 (e). With the increase to the adult funding stream for FY06, but the lack of any transfer to adult funding from the dislocated worker funding, we anticipate that 233 customers will be placed into training services through Title IA.

Boston releases WIA Adult training funds in July, November, and February in order to ensure that the entire allocation is not expended in the first few months. Thus, customers are more likely to be able to secure reemployment services, including training, over the course of the entire year. Customers who are interested in training attend Career Center Orientation sessions where program eligibility, labor market information, and the process for obtaining an individual training account are reviewed. A customer then meets individually with a Career Center Case Manager who determines if he/she is an appropriate training candidate. The next step is for the customer to research and select an approved training vendor from the state listing. Finally, the Case Manager presents the ITA to the Fiscal Agent for approval. ITA approval is based on policies adopted by the Boston Workforce Investment Board that give priority to individuals who are those most in need of training services (e.g. those whose skills are obsolete in the marketplace and who have substantial barriers to re-employment). These policies are outlined in the Boston Career Center Best Practice Guide.

Boston's Workforce Investment Board together with the Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services as the Fiscal Agent have designed a WIA ITA approval and case management process which includes a series of checks and balances to ensure that customers receive appropriate reemployment services. These services include assessment, labor market information, counseling, training, job search and placement services. The Boston Best Practice Group, co-chaired by the PIC and JCS, and made up Career Center and training vendor front line staff, meet bimonthly to ensure a coordinated and timely ITA referral process. JCS monitors the Career Centers and selected training vendors over the course of the year and the PIC conducts an annual Career Center charter review process.

5. What specific continuous improvement strategies are planned by the local partners in 06 to strengthen the operation of the One-Stop Career Center(s)?

a) Describe specific projects planned by the local partners to improve service delivery in FY06 to promote improvement in local service delivery. Should include a discussion of gains from the prior year's improvement initiatives and how the FY06 builds on those outcomes. Should also clearly describe how the planned improvement initiatives are supported by the board, Title I Administrator and local CC partners.

This response uses the activities delineated in our FY05 plan as the baseline to describe gains from last year and plans for FY06. All of these activities are jointly staffed and implemented by the board, Title I Administrator and local partners. Each year the Board, Fiscal Agent and career center operators engage in a number of activities to ensure continuous quality improvement and to enhance delivery of services. These activities include:

- Convening a Workforce Advisory Group that includes partners, career center operators, training providers, and advocates to develop and enhance systems and practices across the entire service delivery system;

As a result of the WAG's annual review process, the membership has convened two work groups: one will identify data sets that represent activities of the various stakeholders in the Boston workforce development and labor exchange systems to determine which can be used to inform system improvement; the second is focused on deepening understanding of the customer process flows across the programs and entities represented by the various workforce development systems in the city. This increased understanding may identify gaps or disconnects between systems. This knowledge will help direct-service providers counsel program participants attempting to comply with an array of systemic demands.

- Convening a Best Practices Workgroup to develop practices specific to the flow of services that facilitate customers moving between providers with as much efficiency and effectiveness as possible;

The Boston Best Practice Work Group for ITA Management meets every other month to assist training providers and career center staff in staying abreast of WIA system performance, in identifying bottlenecks in customer flow and in developing materials and procedures to ensure the most effective assessment and appropriate use of WIA funds in the context of a user-friendly system. This work has contributed to maintaining a drop out rate of less than 4% for FY'05. For FY06, continued study of customer flow to balance access to resources with prudent use of funds and the development of relevant materials is planned.

- Continuing a Charter Review Process that includes customer focus groups, point of service interviews, and reviewing both a progress report and a business plan from career center operators.

The Employment & Training Systems Committee of the Board established the questions that served as the focus for this year's review of career center service delivery issues and performance. These questions were formulated based on a number of sources: 1) The Committee's review of issues it has considered over the course of the year; 2) labor and economic market data; and 3) input from Career Center directors and PIC staff. The following questions were the focus of the charter review site visit in FY05 and served as the organizing themes for the centers' Strategic Plan submissions:

1. Job Seeker Demand and Impact:

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of customers attending the Career Center Seminar when compared to last year. Data analysis also indicates that this population is has proportionately more Caucasians and customers with higher educational attainment than the career center general population. On top of this, based on both Workforce Board and state data, it appears that the Boston career centers are experiencing at least a 50% increase in overall demand for services

a) What, if any effect, has the introduction of the CCS and increases in overall job seeker customer demand had on your center?
b) How have you gathered information about the impact?
c) How have you used that information to make changes or maintain capacity in areas such as staff deployment, program design, service delivery processes, space utilization, etc.
d) What mechanisms are in place to support staff through the process?

2. Maintaining Business Responsiveness

The career center system has two customers: job seekers and businesses. In order to meet the demands of both sets of customers, career center staff must be responsive to each. During this slow "jobless recovery," maintaining relationships with existing business customers and engaging new ones is especially challenging.

a) What is your current overall strategy regarding services to business?
b) How are you maintaining sustainable relationships in this "buyer's" market?
c) How do you engage new businesses?
d) What services do you market?
e) How do you measure your impact?

3. Measuring and Maintaining Customer Satisfaction

High standards of customer service and customer satisfaction have been central tenets of the career center initiative Boston from its inception. It can become difficult over time and in the face of diminishing resources and high demand to remain focused on this imperative. This question asks you to review your customer satisfaction assessment methods and steps you have taken to address any areas of concern.

a) What methods do you use to assess customer satisfaction?
b) What have you learned about your career center's strengths and areas for improvement?

c) What actions have you taken to either enhance areas in which customers indicate that you are strong or to address gaps identified by your customer satisfaction assessment mechanisms?

- Soliciting ongoing customer feedback through focus groups, interviews and surveys at the career center level and the Board level;

Last year, through Voice of the Customer focus groups and interviews yielded 210 customer contacts.

Totals by Type of Activity	#	% of total contacts
Interviews	123	59%
Job Seeker Focus Groups	68	32%
Generic at Centers	44	21%
Specialty (Long Term Unemployed, Youth)	24	11%
Business Customer Focus Groups & Questionnaires	19	9%
Total	210	100%

The interview and focus group protocols for job seeker customers are generally open-ended and cover topics including service utilization, perceptions of staff, treatment, facility, access to individual attention, etc. Data for the availability of personal attention reflect the reality of increased volume far outstripping resources. The number of customers who described individual attention as "always available" declined from 88% in to 73%. Despite the decline in availability of individual attention, the percentage of customers who felt that they had been well treated increased from 70% to 80%. Positive opinions of staff increased from 85% to 90%.

- Sustaining staff teams at each of the career centers that focus on particular processes that are critical to customer service and performance;

Each career center has convened a continuous quality improvement team to focus on the needs and expectations of job seeker customers. All centers have used information collected and analyzed by these groups to alter the frequency, content and modality of services to respond to changes in the demographics of job seeker customers and to develop materials that enhance customer understanding of the job search process and ability to make effective use of career center services.

- Expanding fiscal agent-led work groups of training providers and career center staff focused on improving training for specific groups of customers (e.g. limited English speakers);

PIC/JCS staff are meeting directly with representatives of the Department of Education, have actively recruited members for the WAG that represent

operations and policy staff from DoE and Commonwealth Corporation, are providing support to the WAG subgroups that are analyzing service gaps.

- Capacity building for system providers;

  As the volume of customers increases the need to more closely align the skills and interests of job seekers with the qualifications sought by businesses increases as well. Capacity building activities for FY'06 include providing support to staff through the development of a series of LMI presentations.

b) Continuous improvement initiatives to be implemented to assure the attainment of all FY2006 goals.

Adults

In FY04, the Boston system did not pass two Dislocated Worker performance goals: the Entered Employment rate and the Employed with Credential rate. Over the course of FY05, staff of the Workforce Board and the Title I Administrator worked closely with career center staff, training them on the importance of follow-up with customers beyond the time of initial employment and retention, as well as on more effective use of supplemental data to document employments not captured by the Wage Record system.

In preparation for FY06, career center staff will be trained on clearly differentiating between customer income to be used to document eligibility and the customer income that will be used as a benchmark for wage gain. The availability of the web-based income calculator to use as a tool in helping customers set appropriate wage goals for after training will be included in this training. During the course of FY06, performance data will be reviewed as it becomes available and ongoing TA will be provided to the three career centers as needed.

Youth

In FY04, the Boston system did not pass the Older Youth Entered Employment and the Earnings Gains measures. Over the course of FY05, staff of the Workforce Board and the Title I Administrator worked with youth vendors as a group on issues related to MOSES data entry and assuring that operators had a clear understanding of the basis on which performance is calculated. Because dealing with vendors as a group on these matters has had mixed results, for FY06 we plan to work with vendors individually and also to monitor individual case records on an on-going basis. As explained above, in 3,d, be would welcome technical assistance on best practices. We remain concerned, however, because performance goals continue to rise, with little regard for the fact that youth are in the worst labor market since the federal government began tracking teenage employment in 1948.[7]

[7] For the national attention this issue has generated, see "The Young and the Jobless" by Bob Herbert in The New York Times, May 12, 2005.